Topic #6: Social Interaction

- **Conversation Analysis**
- **Defying Structure**
- **Modes of Social Interaction**
- **Power, Authority, and Social Interaction**

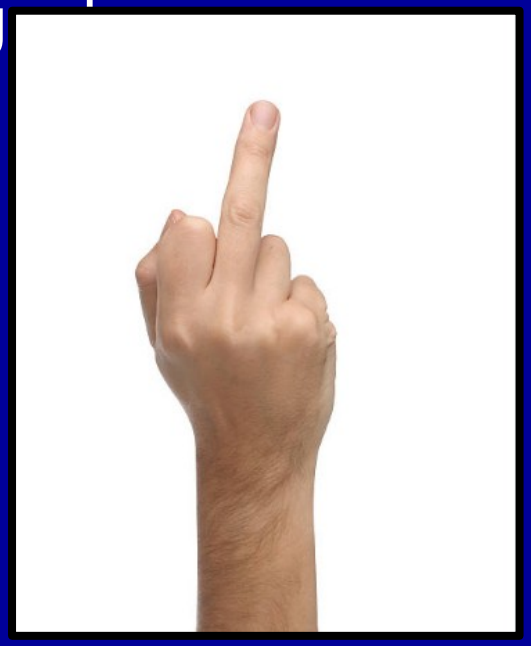
Topic #6: Social Interaction

Readings for topic #6:

1. Conversation Analysis by Ritzer
2. Modes of Social Interaction by Brym et al.
3. Beyond Individual Motives by Brym et al.

- A tremendously significant part of our lives that is central to the human experience
  - Much of our daily lives involves acting and reacting in relation to others within small-scale, everyday interactions (i.e., microstructures)
- These interactions may seem mundane or insignificant
  - But when we look more closely, intricate patterns, norms, and meanings emerge from these seemingly trivial ways of interacting
- E.g., handshake — What basic pattern is repeated?
  - Disrupt this pattern = awkwardness

Many other hand g



Patterns that give our interactions meaning, without which there would be considerable confusion

What do you think might have happened in this skating race?

- Without patterns (as well as norms and meanings), interactions quickly become awkward, strange, confusing, and even nonsensical

- **Conversation Analysis**
- Let's explore a few examples from the assigned reading on conversation analysis
  - "Detecting and describing the orderly phenomena of which conversation and interaction are composed"
  - We are consistently using and reproducing micro conversational structures
- E.g., answering the telephone
  - Take me threw the typical sequence when you answer a phone call from an acquaintance (without call display)…

- 1) Summons-answer; 2) identification-recognition; 3) greeting; 4) “how are you?” sequence; 5) topic (Schegloff, 1986)

Summons-answer:	0		Phone rings
	1	Answerer:	Hello

This pattern of interaction would change if the call was from a stranger, if someone was calling 911, etc.

Source: Schegloff cited in O'Keeffe et al., Introducing Pragmatics in Use, p. 117

911: Midcity emergency
Caller: Yes, uh, I need a paramedic please
911: Where to?

911: Midcity emergency
Caller: Yes, I'd like to report a loud party
911: Where is it ma'am?

Note there is no greeting or how are you sequence, and identification will likely come later…instead, the speaker goes straight to the topic

Source: Heritage et al., Talk in Action, p. 62

- 1) Summons-answer; 2) identification-recognition; 3) greeting; 4) “how are you?” sequence; 5) topic (Schegloff, 1986)

- E.g., initiating laughter
  - How do you know when to laugh during a conversation?
    - A common trigger is when the speaker laughs

Someone says: "I slipped on the icy stairs this morning and landed flat on my back!" *(laughs)*

Their laughter signals to the listener that, while the fall could have been dangerous, the speaker is fine and that the listener can laugh about it too

- 1) Summons-answer; 2) identification-recognition; 3) greeting; 4) “how are you?” sequence; 5) topic (Schegloff, 1986)

- E.g., initiating laughter
  - How do you know when to laugh during a conversation?
    - A common trigger is when the speaker laughs
    - Used as a repair mechanism to diffuse embarrassment or awkwardness

Doctor: “You’ve gained a little weight since last time.”

Patient: *(laughs)* “Yeah, I guess the holidays got to me.”

Doctor: *(laughs lightly)* “That’s what they’re good for.”

Here, the patient’s laughter softens the awkwardness of weight gain, transforming it into a less confrontational and more collaborative moment

(Also a trigger that allows the doctor to laugh)

- 1) Summons-answer; 2) identification-recognition; 3) greeting; 4) “how are you?” sequence; 5) topic (Schegloff, 1986)

- E.g., initiating laughter
  - How do you know when to laugh during a conversation?
    - A common trigger is when the speaker laughs
    - Used as a repair mechanism to diffuse embarrassment or awkwardness
    - A tool for softening disagreement

Person A: “I think we should just take the highway; it’ll be faster, no doubt.”

Person B: *(laughs softly)* “Faster, huh? Maybe if you’re not counting traffic jams and accidents…”

Here, Person B uses laughter to signal that they disagree with Person A’s assumption that the highway will definitely be faster, but the laughter makes the disagreement less harsh, softening the challenge

- 1) Summons-answer; 2) identification-recognition; 3) greeting; 4) “how are you?” sequence; 5) topic (Schegloff, 1986)

- E.g., initiating laughter
  - How do you know when to laugh during a conversation?
    - A common trigger is when the speaker laughs
    - Used as a repair mechanism to diffuse embarrassment or awkwardness
    - A tool for softening disagreement
  - Laughter is not merely a response to something funny or humorous

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don’t fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)

This week has demonstrated that we are a party united in purpose, strategy, and resolve.

Soviet Marxism is ideologically, politically, and morally bankrupt.

There’s no government anywhere that is tackling the problem with more vigour, imagination, and determination than this conservative government.

Source: Hutchby et al., Conversation Analysis, p. 184

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don't fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)
  - There are additional rhetorical devices

    3) List

Language designed to be persuasive

This week has demonstrated that we are a party united in purpose, strategy, and resolve.

Soviet Marxism is ideologically, politically, and morally bankrupt.

There’s no government anywhere that is tackling the problem with more vigour, imagination, and determination than this conservative government.

Lists typically have how many items?

Source: Hutchby et al., Conversation Analysis, p. 184

This week has demonstrated that we are a party united in purpose, strategy, and resolve.

Soviet Marxism is ideologically, politically, and morally bankrupt.

There's no government anywhere that is tackling the problem with more vigour, imagination, and determination than this conservative government.

Lists typically have how many items?

Source: Hutchby et al., Conversation Analysis, p. 184

The “rule of three” accomplishes a few things:

1) Predictable closure – the third item is recognized as a completion of thought
2) Effective for emphasis – hits the right balance between brevity and emphasis
3) Easier to recall – 3 is the smallest number to complete a pattern

“Our goal is to build a society rooted in…

…freedom, justice, and equality”

vs.

…freedom, fairness, opportunity, accountability, vision, resilience, innovation, and unity.”

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don't fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)
  - There are additional rhetorical devices
    3) List
    4) Contrast

Language designed to be persuasive

With contrast: “We cannot choose comfort when the world demands courage. We cannot wait for change to come; we must be the ones who create it. This is not the time to stand still but to step forward with purpose and determination.”

Without contrast: “We must be courageous in the face of challenges. We must act decisively to create the change we need. This is a time for purpose and determination as we move forward together.”

The latter doesn’t present a clear tension or choice, making it feel less dynamic and

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don't fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)
  - There are additional rhetorical devices
    3) List
    4) Contrast
    5) Puzzle solution

Language designed to be persuasive

"How can we bridge the divide in our communities, heal the wounds of the past, and create a better future for our children? The answer lies in empathy, understanding, and a shared commitment to progress.

Ask a question, and then you provide the answer

"How can we bridge the divide in our communities, heal the wounds of the past, and create a better future for our children? The answer lies in empathy, understanding, and a shared commitment to progress.

Ask a question, and then you provide the answer

And the answer uses the rule of three

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don't fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)
  - There are additional rhetorical devices
    3) List
    4) Contrast
    5) Puzzle solution

    Language designed to be persuasive

    More are listed in the reading…
  - E.g., Bill Clinton at the 2012 Democratic Party Convention

- E.g., generating applause
  - Especially important during political speeches
  - The audience needs cues to know when they should clap, so that they don't fear clapping
  - 1) Emphasize; and 2) provide a clear completion point (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986)
  - There are additional rhetorical devices

    3) List
    4) Contrast ≈ 25%
    5) Puzzle solution

    More are listed in the reading…

    Language designed to be persuasive
  - E.g., Bill Clinton at the 2012 Democratic Party Convention

- E.g., booing
  - Two reasons applause and booing begin: 1) individual decision; or 2) a product of monitoring the reactions of other audience members
    - Applause is largely the result of individual decision making, and thus is more immediate
    - Booing is largely the result of monitoring, and thus is more delayed
  - Through monitoring, we realize that we won't be alone, which helps alleviate the fear of disapproval from other audience members
  - Much like everyday conversations, where agreement tends to be prompt; disagreement tends to be delayed

- But of course, these patterns and structures extend beyond hand gestures and conversations
- E.g., walking
  - Walk on the right-hand side
  - Sometimes even implicitly enforced

An example of the enforcement of this common assumption around walking

All of us possess routine practices that we use when we walk, and we use those practices in conjunction with other people who walk with, by, past, in front of, behind, around…us. ”Doing” walking, then, is the result of the concerted efforts of members of a community. It is a profoundly social act.

My 3rd most favourite quote in this course

- Proximity
- If one person falls behind or ahead “corrective measures” are necessary
- Walking alone is also a social accomplishment

Source: Anderson, Sociology: A Critical Introduction, 1996, p. 185

- But of course, these patterns and structures extend beyond hand gestures and conversations
- E.g., walking
  - Walk on the right-hand side
  - Sometimes even implicitly enforced
- E.g., traffic lights
  - Have you ever waited at a red light, at 3am, when NO ONE was around?

The traffic lights went green yellow red
down the empty street in front of us
like a small mindlessness captured forever
in the double mirror of a barbershop.

Three in the morning, Dad, good citizen
stopped, waited, looked left, right.
He had been driving nine hundred miles,
had nearly a hundred more to go,
but if there was any impatience
it was only the steady growl of the engine
which could just as easily be called a purr.

I chided him for stopping;
he told me our civilization is founded
on people stopping for lights at three in the morning.

- A poem by Bruce Hawkins, cited in Livingston, 2013

The traffic lights went green yellow red
down the empty street in front of us
like a small mindlessness captured forever
in the double mirror of a barbershop.

Three in the morning, Dad, good citizen
stopped, waited, looked left, right.
He had been driving nine hundred miles,
had nearly a hundred more to go,
but if there was any impatience
it was only the steady growl of the engine
which could just as easily be called a purr.

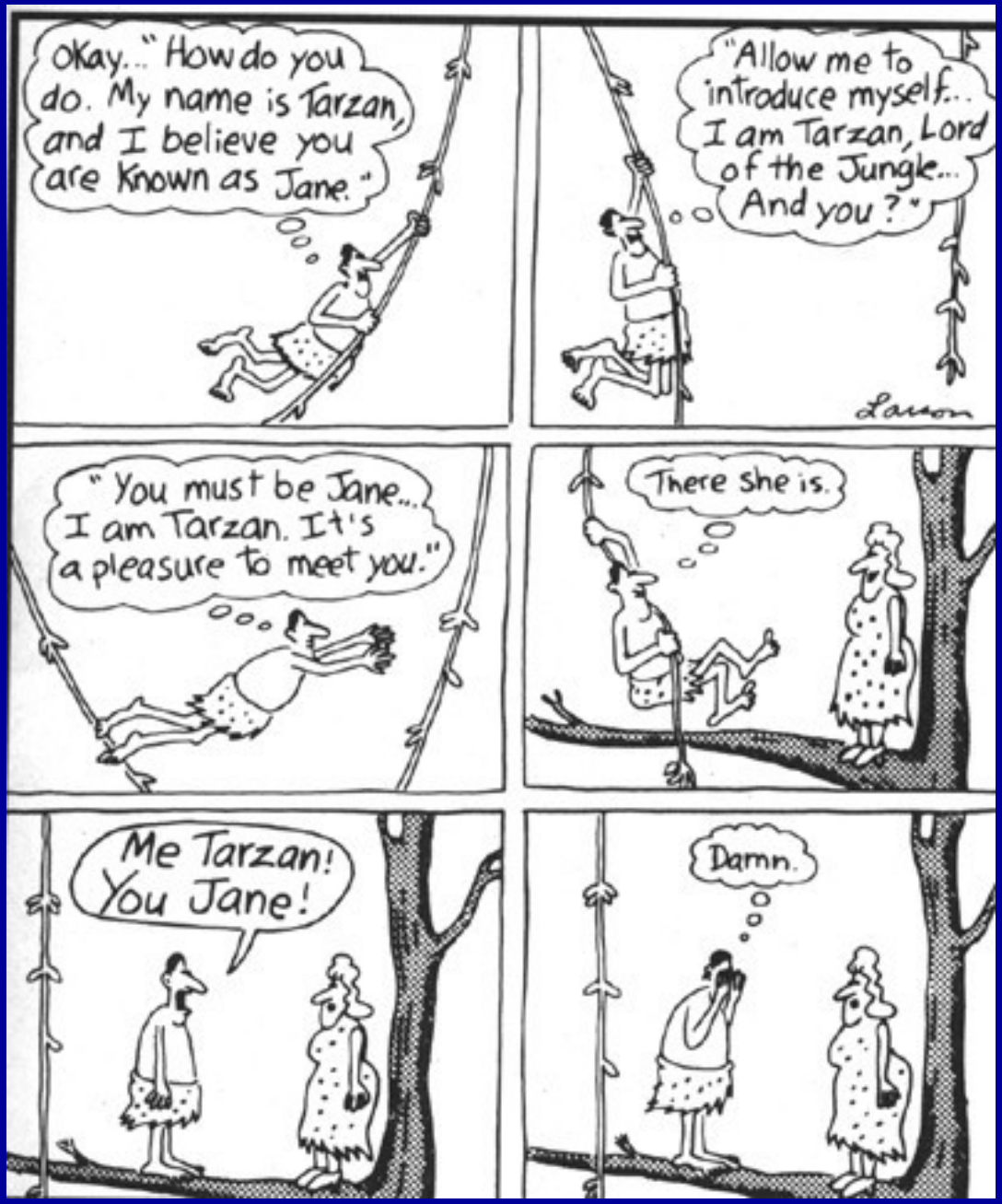
I chided him for stopping;
he told me our civilization is founded
on people stopping for lights at three in the morning.

People's attachment to the group and its ideas – its values, its beliefs, and its stoplights – makes society possible

- A poem by Bruce Hawkins, cited in Livingston, 2013

- But of course, these patterns and structures extend beyond hand gestures and conversations
- E.g., walking
  - Walk on the right-hand side
  - Sometimes even implicitly enforced
- E.g., traffic lights
  - Have you ever waited at a red light, at 3am, when NO ONE was around?
- What's the moral of the story?
  - There are intricate patterns to our everyday interactions
  - And these patterns form the foundation of

- These intricate patterns are structured around statuses, roles, and norms
  - Statuses – recognized positions that people occupy
    - Being a student, teacher, parent, child, employee, boss, friend, romantic partner, etc.
    - Consider how your behavior changes around your boyfriend's/girlfriend's parents compared to your close friends…
    - …or when you meet someone you find attractive


Okay..." How do you do. My name is Tarzan, and I believe you are known as Jane."
"Allow me to introduce myself... I am Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle... And you?"
Larson
"You must be Jane... I am Tarzan. It's a pleasure to meet you."
There she is.
Me Tarzan! You Jane!
Damn.

- These intricate patterns are structured around statuses, roles, and norms
  - Statuses – recognized positions that people occupy
    - Being a student, teacher, parent, child, employee, boss, friend, romantic partner, etc.
    - Consider how your behavior changes around your boyfriend's/girlfriend's parents compared to your close friends…
    - …or when you meet someone you find attractive
  - Roles – the behaviors, obligations, and norms expected of someone occupying a particular status
    - While statuses define "what" we are, roles dictate "how" we are supposed to act

- Norms – our shared expectations and rules of behaviour
  - Always changing depending on context
  - A lecture hall vs. a concert hall – similar venues, but the norms around behaviours vary (e.g., dress code, the appropriateness of applause, different degrees of involvement, etc.)
  - Many similar venues…a theatre, a movie, a stand-up comedy event, a sports event, church, etc. have different norms of behaviour

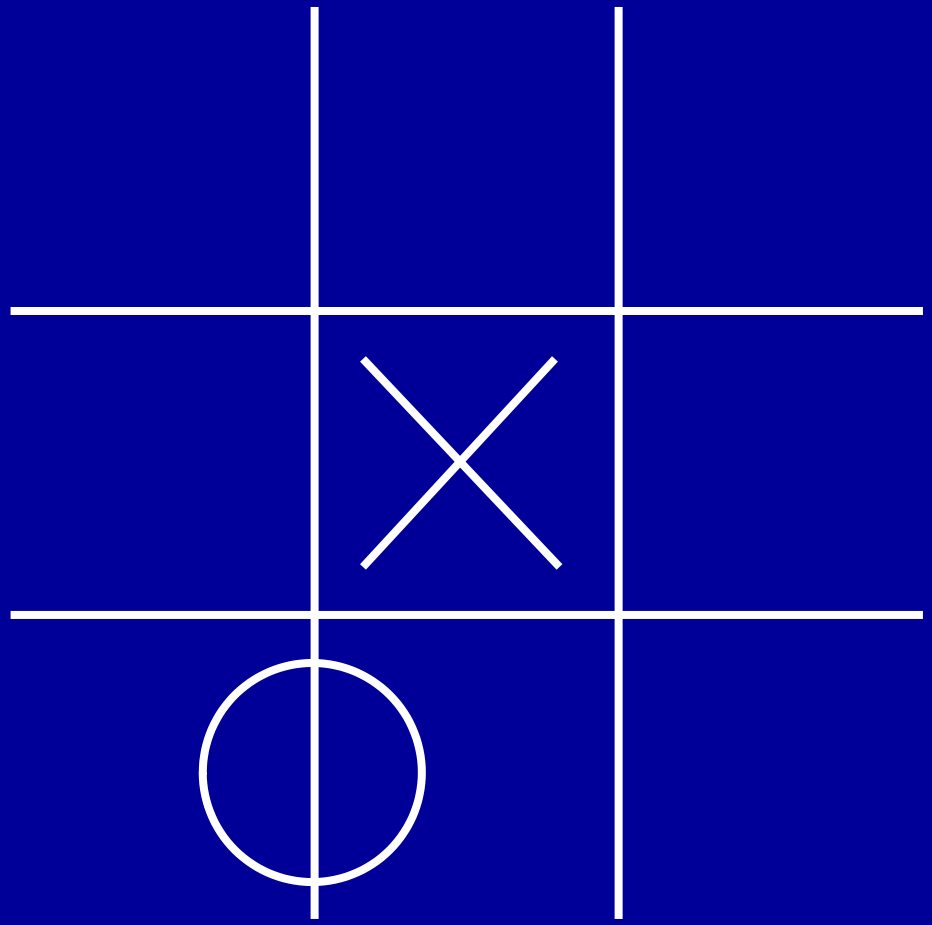
- **Defying Structure**
- One of the best ways to understand the complexity of social interactions is by challenging established norms
- By intentionally violating norms, we shed light on the methods we use to construct a social reality…
  - …and reveal that we are unaware that we are engaging in these methods
- Formally, referred to as “breaching experiments”
  - E.g., elevator behaviour
  - Face the wrong way in an elevator

- When we challenge what is “normal”, astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrassment, and/or even anger can follow
  - E.g., Just for Laughs Gags

- When we challenge what is “normal”, astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrassment, and/or even anger can follow
  - E.g., Just for Laughs Gags
- Reflects how important it is to us to engage in routine, common-sense activities
  - Subjects (or victims) move quickly to attempt to normalize the breach
- Ethnomethodology – study of the everyday methods we use to understand (often unconsciously) and make sense of the world
  - We usually notice the “normal” when it is violated

- Harold Garfinkel

- What is the subject matter of EMs?...it is the infinite variety of everyday life



Source: Ritzer, Modern Sociological Theory, 2000, p. 251

1. Tip your friends for small acts of kindness.
2. At the grocery store, take shopping items out of other people's shopping carts. When questioned, simply say the item in the cart was more convenient to reach than the item on the shelf.
3. When shopping, intentionally mistake customers for salespeople.
4. Insist on ordering a whopper at McDonald's.
5. When asked a question by a stranger, bark at them.
6. When playing a game, blatantly cheat, and then profusely deny any wrongdoing.
7. Your own examples?

- Harold Garfinkel

- What is the subject matter of EMs?...it is the infinite variety of everyday life
- E.g., have you ever interacted with a “close talker”?

- Harold Garfinkel

- What is the subject matter of EMs?...it is the infinite variety of everyday life
- E.g., have you ever interacted with a “close talker”?
  - Intimate zone – 45 cm
  - Personal zone – 45cm to 1.2m
  - Social zone – 1.2m to 3.7m
  - Public zone – 3.7m+

My 2nd most favourite quote in this course

- “...the extraordinary organization of the ordinary” (Pollner, cited in Ritzer, 2000)

All of us possess routine practices that we use when we walk, and we use those practices in conjunction with other people who walk with, by, past, in front of, behind, around…us. ”Doing” walking, then, is the result of the concerted efforts of members of a community. It is a profoundly social act.

My 3rd most favourite quote in this course

- Proximity
- If one person falls behind or ahead “corrective measures” are necessary
- Walking alone is also a social accomplishment

Source: Anderson, Sociology: A Critical Introduction, 1996, p. 185

- **Modes of Social Interaction**
- Interaction as competition
  - Have you ever had a conversation…?
  - According to Charles Derber, our need for attention is not being met
  - Subtle competition for attention

...a set of extremely common conversational practices which show an unresponsiveness to other's topics and involve turning them into one's own. Because of norms prohibiting blatantly egocentric behavior, these practices are often exquisitely subtle...

Although conversationalists are free to introduce topics about themselves, they are expected to maintain an appearance of genuine interest in those about others in a conversation. A delicate face-saving system requires that people refrain from openly disregarding other's concerns and keep expressions of disinterest from becoming visible.

Source: Derber, Charles, et al., Sociology in Today's World, 2011, p. 108

A “support-response”

A “shift-response”

John: “I’m feeling really starved.”

Mary: “Oh, I just ate.”

John: “Well, I’m feeling really starved.”

Mary: “When was the last time you ate?”

An example of “conversational narcissism”

Jim: You know, I've been wanting to get a car for so long.

Bill: Yeah. (support-response)

Jim: Maybe when I get the job this summer, I'll finally buy one. But they're so expensive.

Bill: I was just thinking about how much I spend on my car. I think over $1500 a year. You know I had to lay out over $750 for insurance. And $250 for that fender job. (shift-response)

Jim: Yeah, it's absurd. (support-response)

Bill: I'm sick of cars. I've been thinking of getting a bicycle and getting around in a healthy way...

Jim: I love bikes. But I'm just really feeling a need for a car now. I want to be able to drive up the coast whenever I want. (shift-response)

Bill: Uh huh...(support-response)

Jim: I could really get into a convertible.

Bill: Oh, you can go anywhere on a bike. I'm going to borrow John's bike and go way up north next weekend. You know, a couple of weekends ago Sue and I rented bikes and rode down toward the Cape... (shift-response)

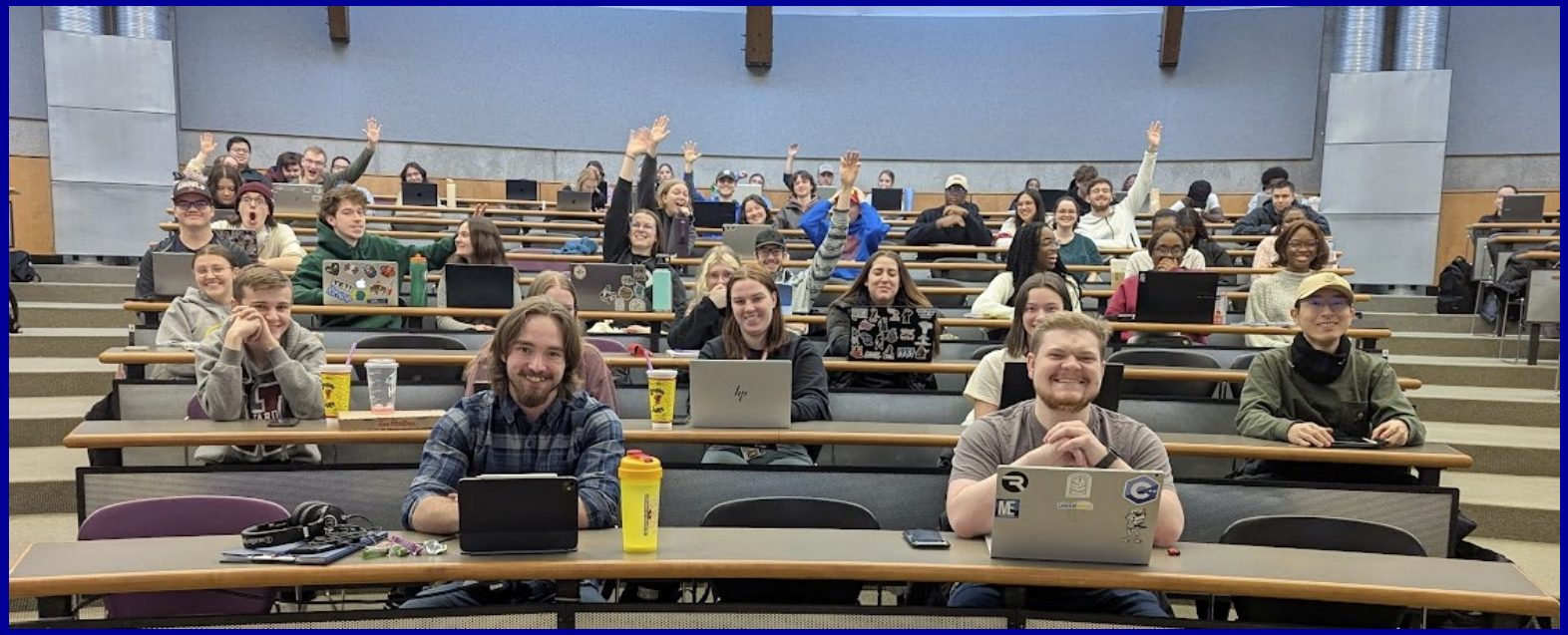
- **Modes of Social Interaction**
- Interaction as competition
  - Have you ever had a conversation…?
  - According to Charles Derber, our need for attention is not being met
  - Subtle competition for attention
  - Competitive exchange cements interaction
  - ‘Exchange theory’ expands this idea to all of our interactions
  - People interact to the degree they get something valuable out of the interaction
  - Without shared “payoffs”, relationships are likely to end

- ‘Rational choice theory’ is another variant
- Interacting people try to maximize benefits and minimize costs
- But we should acknowledge that not all our interactions/ relationships are guided solely by self-interest

- Interaction as symbolic
  - “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players”
  - Erving Goffman – we are constantly engaging in role playing to manage how others perceive us
    - Impression management
  - E.g., dancing at a nightclub

- E.g., have you ever tried to act cool? Smart? Flirty?
- We are constantly trying to present idealized images of ourselves, and hide the non-ideal things
  - “Front stage” and “backstage”
  - E.g., professors – spend several hours preparing, but act as if they have always known the material

And students?...



- E.g., have you ever tried to act cool? Smart? Flirty?
- We are constantly trying to present idealized images of ourselves, and hide the non-ideal things
  - “Front stage” and “backstage”
  - E.g., professors – spend several hours preparing, but act as if they have always known the material
- We also sometimes engage in role distancing
  - Common when someone is playing a role they feel is beneath them

…when people think a role they are playing is embarrassing or beneath them, they typically want to give their peers the impression that the role is not their “true” self. My parents force me to sing in the church choir; I’m working at McDonald’s just to earn a few extra dollars, but I’m going back to college next semester; this old car I’m driving is just a loaner. These are the kinds of rationalizations individuals offer when distancing themselves from a role.

Brym et al., 5th ed., p. 129

- E.g., have you ever tried to act cool? Smart? Flirty?
- We are constantly trying to present idealized images of ourselves, and hide the non-ideal things
  - “Front stage” and “backstage”
  - E.g., professors – spend several hours preparing, but act as if they have always known the material
- We also sometimes engage in role distancing
  - Common when someone is playing a role they feel is beneath them
- What’s the moral of the story (according to Goffman)?
  - There is no single self, just an ensemble of roles we play and attempt to mold in various social

- Known as ‘dramaturgical analysis”
  - Views social interaction as a sort of play in which people present themselves so that they appear in the best possible light

According to a 3rd year medical student, “The best way of impressing [advisors] with your competence is asking questions you know the answer to. Because if they ever put it back on you, ‘Well what do you think?’ then you can tell them what you think and you’d give a very intelligent answer because you knew it. You didn’t ask it to find out information. You asked it to impress people”

Brym et al., 5th ed., p. 130

- Known as ‘dramaturgical analysis”
  - Views social interaction as a sort of play in which people present themselves so that they appear in the best possible light
- Verbal and nonverbal communication

What do you think might have happened in this skating race?

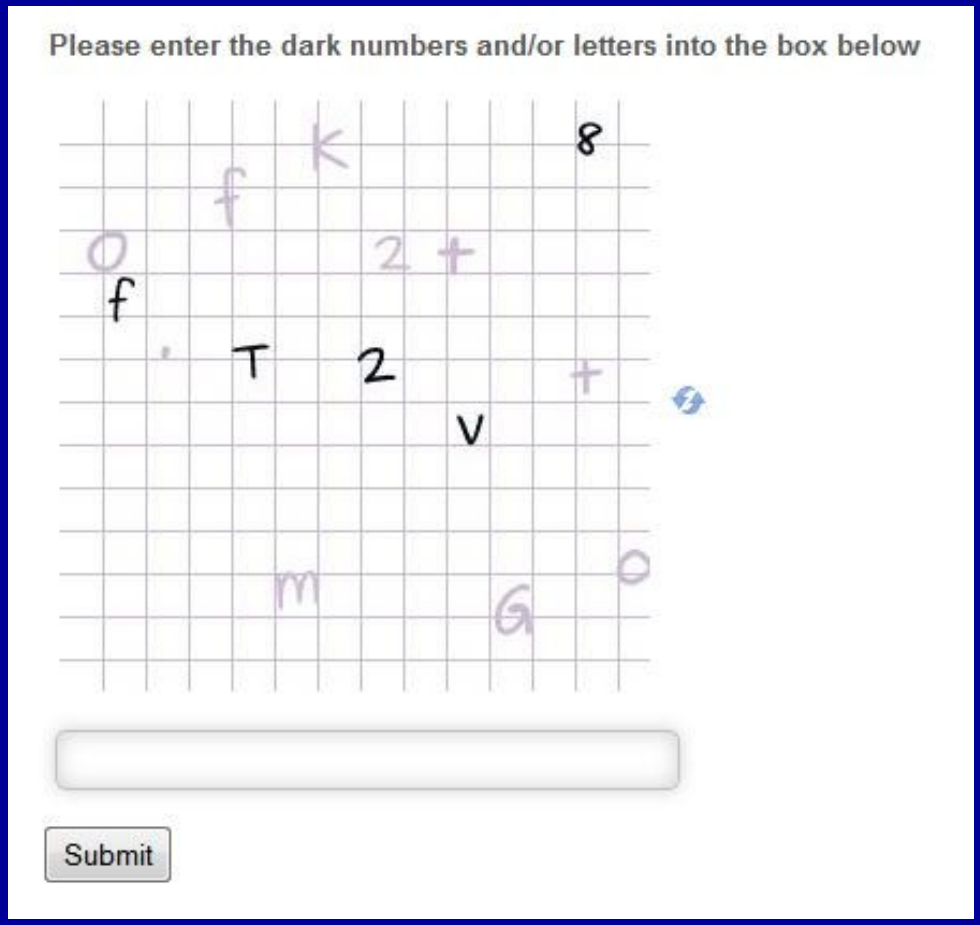
- Known as ‘dramaturgical analysis”
  - Views social interaction as a sort of play in which people present themselves so that they appear in the best possible light
- Verbal and nonverbal communication
  - Voice recognition/translation software

In their house, everything comes in pairs. There’s his car and her car, his towels and her towels, and his library and hers.

In their house everything comes in pairs. There is his car and his car, his towels and his towels, and his library and his.

Source: Hofstadter, The Shallowness of Google Translate, The Atlantic, 2018

- Known as ‘dramaturgical analysis”
  - Views social interaction as a sort of play in which people present themselves so that they appear in the best possible light
- Verbal and nonverbal communication
  - Voice recognition/translation software
  - We’re not at a point (yet?) where software programs can appreciate social context



CAPTCHA - an acronym for “**C**ompletely **A**utomated **P**ublic **T**uring test to tell **C**omputers and **H**umans **A**part”...

- Known as ‘dramaturgical analysis”
  - Views social interaction as a sort of play in which people present themselves so that they appear in the best possible light
- Verbal and nonverbal communication
  - Voice recognition/translation software
  - We’re not at a point (yet?) where software programs can appreciate social context
  - And social context is made up of all kinds of nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, postures, gestures, status, etc.)
  - E.g., how are you currently sitting?

1

2

3

Power positions (take up space)

4

5

Compliance positions (take up less space)

Power and compliance?

Which are “appropriate” to the gender of the person?

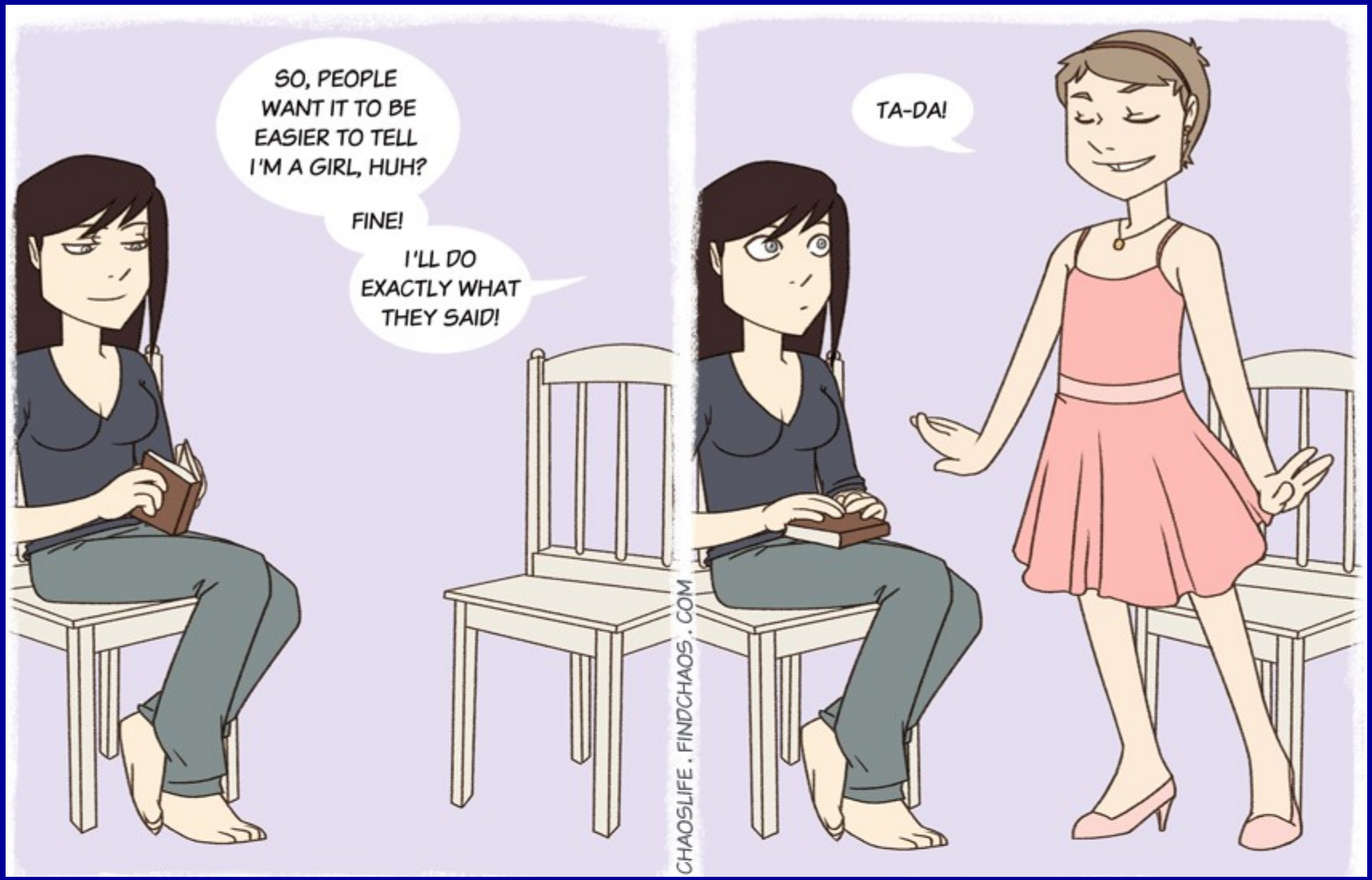
Source: Brym et al., p. 132

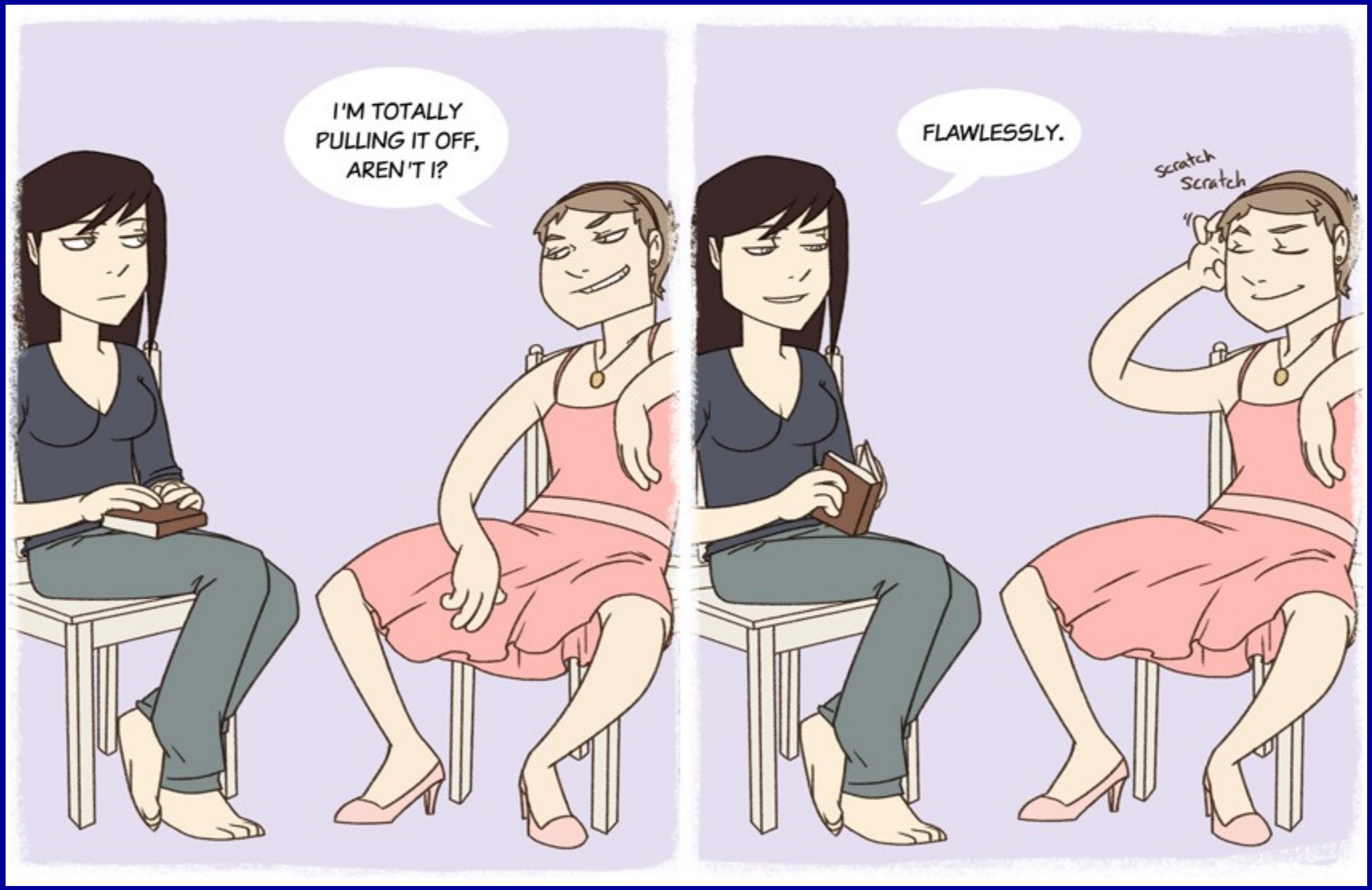
ights. 120 Seconds.
lext Topic.
EEP UP.
SAU AV
Litter
Stops

You
.Mic

An important part of masculinity is demonstratin g POWER

Philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky once observed that being feminine often means using one’s body to portray powerlessness. Consider: A feminine person keeps her body small and contained; she makes sure that it doesn’t take up to much space or impose itself. She walks and sits in tightly packaged ways. She doesn’t cover the breadth of the sidewalk or expand herself beyond the chair she occupies.


SO, PEOPLE WANT IT TO BE EASIER TO TELL I'M A GIRL, HUH?
FINE!
I'LL DO EXACTLY WHAT THEY SAID!
TA-DA!
CHAOSLIFE . FINDCHAOS . COM


I'M TOTALLY PULLING IT OFF, AREN'T I?
FLAWLESSLY.
scratch
Scratch

Philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky once observed that being feminine often means using one's body to portray powerlessness. Consider: A feminine person keeps her body small and contained; she makes sure that it doesn't take up to much space or impose itself. She walks and sits in tightly packaged ways. She doesn't cover the breadth of the sidewalk or expand herself beyond the chair she occupies.

Massiveness, power, or abundance in a woman's body is met with distaste," Bartky wrote.

- In this case, gender has become “embodied”
  - Learn to use our bodies differently as part of the performance of masculinity or femininity
  - “Doing gender”

In their 1987 article "Doing Gender" sociologists Candace West and Don H. Zimmermann first introduced their notion of gender not as a trait, a social role or a societal representation, but rather as an accomplishment – the product of daily social practices and behaviors which codify and manifest femininity of masculinity.

Source: The Cultural Reader, 2011

In their 1987 article "Doing Gender" sociologists Candace West and Don H. Zimmermann first introduced their notion of gender not as a trait, a social role or a societal representation, but rather as an accomplishment – the product of daily social practices and behaviors which codify and manifest femininity of masculinity.

Source: The Cultural Reader, 2011

- In this case, gender has become “embodied”
  - Learn to use our bodies differently as part of the performance of masculinity or femininity
  - “Doing gender”
  - Try to reflect on the many ways that you – sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously – “do” gender

Images like these suggest that the social construction of gender shapes body language (i.e., the ways we posture, contort, and move our bodies)

More visual examples...

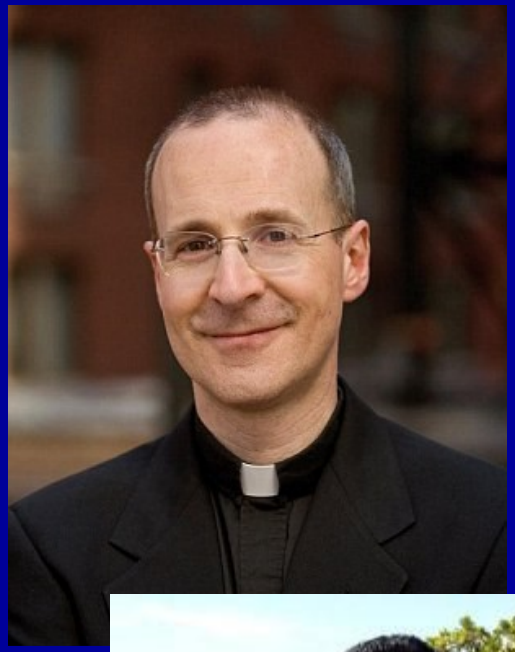
Switcheroo art project, cited in Sharp, 2013

Switcheroo art project, cited in Sharp, 2013

…the postures we associate with men are often expansive or “power” postures

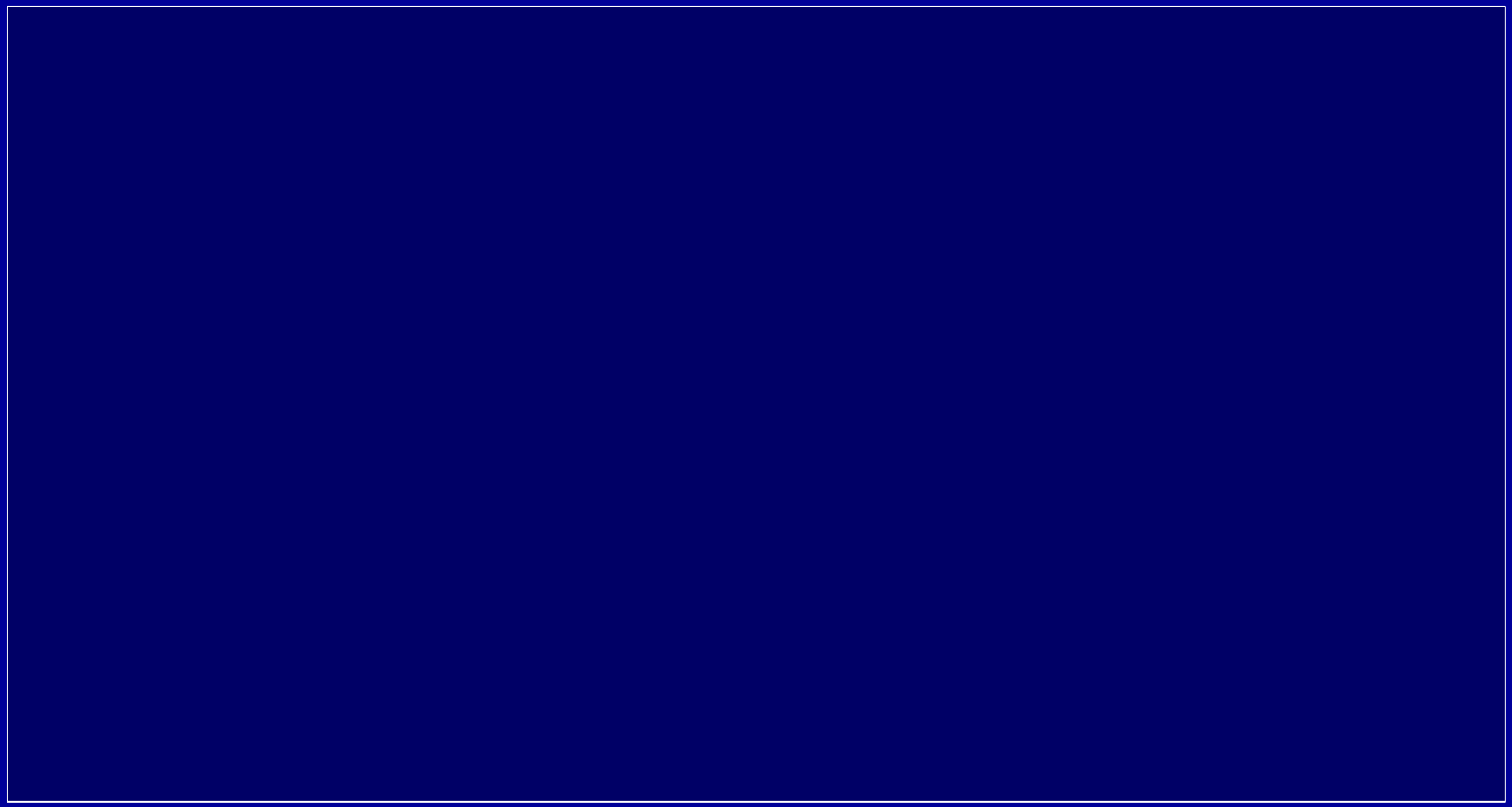
Switcheroo art project, cited in Sharp, 2013

- In this case, gender has become “embodied”
  - Learn to use our bodies differently as part of the performance of masculinity or femininity
  - “Doing gender”
  - Try to reflect on the many ways that you – sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously – “do” gender
- This is part of the wider process of status cues
  - Visual indicators of a person’s social position



- In this case, gender has become “embodied”
  - Learn to use our bodies differently as part of the performance of masculinity or femininity
  - “Doing gender”
  - Try to reflect on the many ways that you – sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously – “do” gender
- This is part of the wider process of status cues
  - Visual indicators of a person’s social position
- Very useful for helping us successfully navigate the social world
- But they can become highly problematic when the degenerate into stereotypes

Probability of Being Stopped by Police in Toronto, by Race, Sex, and Age



Source: Wortley et al. , 1996, cited in Brym and Lie, 2012, p. 86

- “Blink” by Malcolm Gladwell

"A real pleasure. . . . *Blink* brims with surprising insights about our world and ourselves." —*Salon*

#1 National Bestseller

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR

blink

By the author of THE TIPPING POINT

*

The Power of Thinking Without Thinking

Malcolm Gladwell

- “Blink” by Malcolm Gladwell
  - Being male was perceived as a status cue for being a great musician

- **Power, Authority, and Social Interaction**
- The concepts of power and authority are relevant to discussions of social interaction
- Power – probability that one actor within a social relationship will be able to carry out her/his own will despite resistance
  - We can appreciate (and sometimes even feel) how differences in power shape the nature of our micro-level interactions
  - Manager/employee, teacher/student, parent/child, etc.
- Based on the works of Max Weber, sociologists often distinguish between power and authority

- Authority – power that is perceived as legitimate or rightful

So we can imagine scenarios where power exists without authority…

And I suppose we can imagine authority without power…

But it’s more typical for power and authority to operate in tandem

- Authority – power that is perceived as legitimate or rightful
  - Authority acts as a stabilizing force for power by providing structure, legitimacy, and accountability to how power is exercised
  - Authority tends to operate at the macro-level, because it involves broader social systems and structures that help legitimize and institutionalize power
  - E.g., the criminal justice system is an institution of legitimate power, composed of law enforcement, the courts, corrections, the legislature, etc.

- Max Weber distinguishes between 3 types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational
  - Can you think of examples of each?
- When power is exercised without authority, it can become erratic, unregulated, and potentially destructive
  - E.g., dystopian films and novels

THE #1 WORLDWIDE BESTSELLER

MARGARET ATWOOD

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

- Max Weber distinguishes between 3 types of authority: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational
  - Can you think of examples of each?
- When power is exercised without authority, it can become erratic, unregulated, and potentially destructive
  - E.g., dystopian films and novels
- By establishing a recognized framework of power, authority fosters obedience and conformity, and helps maintain stability within society

- After all, we are more likely to obey those we perceive as having the legitimate right to direct our actions
- E.g., teachers in elementary school

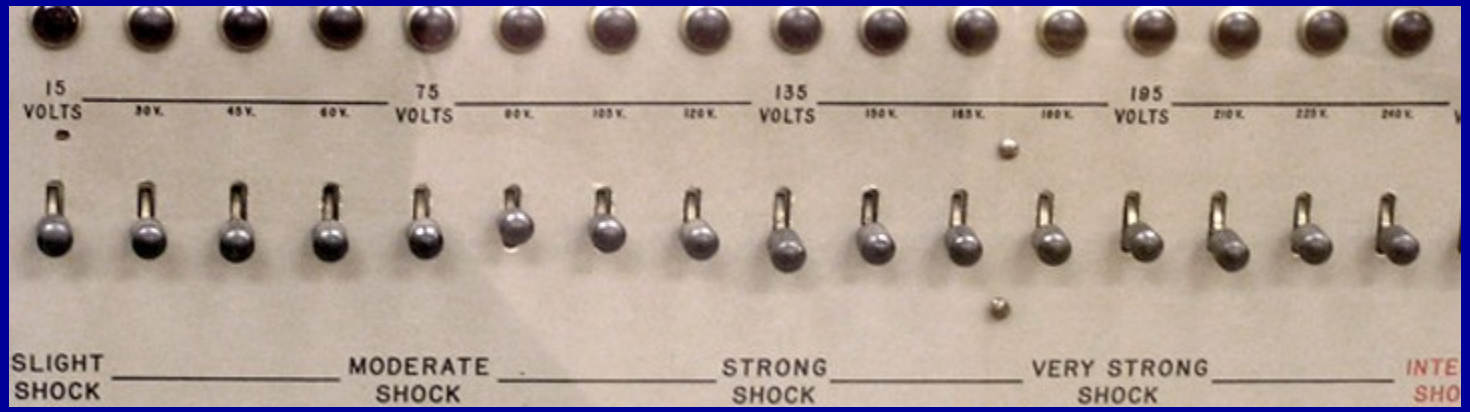
- After all, we are more likely to obey those we perceive as having the legitimate right to direct our actions
- E.g., teachers in elementary school
  - Their authority (as opposed to mere power) creates the framework where student obedience is both expected and justified

- But what happens if what we are being told to do by an authority is immoral or unethical?
- This was a question taken up by some researchers after WWII
  - Why after WWII?

- An attempt to understand how the unfathomable horrors of the Holocaust could have possibly occurred
- Are some humans just inherently evil, or is something more sociological going on?

- Some of the studies that took up this question have become famous, in part for their ethical transgressions
- Experiments on conformity to authority by Stanley Milgram in the 1960s
  - If you were told to do so by someone in authority, would you electrocute someone, possibly to the point of death?
  - Video of a replication of the experiment

- The findings from Milgram’s experiments (and the replication) suggest that over 50% of us would electrocute someone



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbKIkfk-wtc

A condensed version (6 min.) of the original experiment is available here

- The findings from Milgram's experiments (and the replication) suggest that over 50% of us would electrocute someone
- Demonstrates that ordinary people will commit harmful acts when ordered to do so by an authority

- Why do so many of us conform, even when our actions would be considered immoral?
- Sociologists emphasize 3 factors (see Brym et al. reading):

1) Norms of solidarity demand conformity
   - When we form relationships there are "norms" about how we should behave to sustain that relationship

- Examples of the qualities that we look for in a friend?
- Trustworthy, “have my back”, loyal, support me in times of difficulty, non-judgmental, etc.
- May pay more attention to these “norms of solidarity” than the morality of our own actions

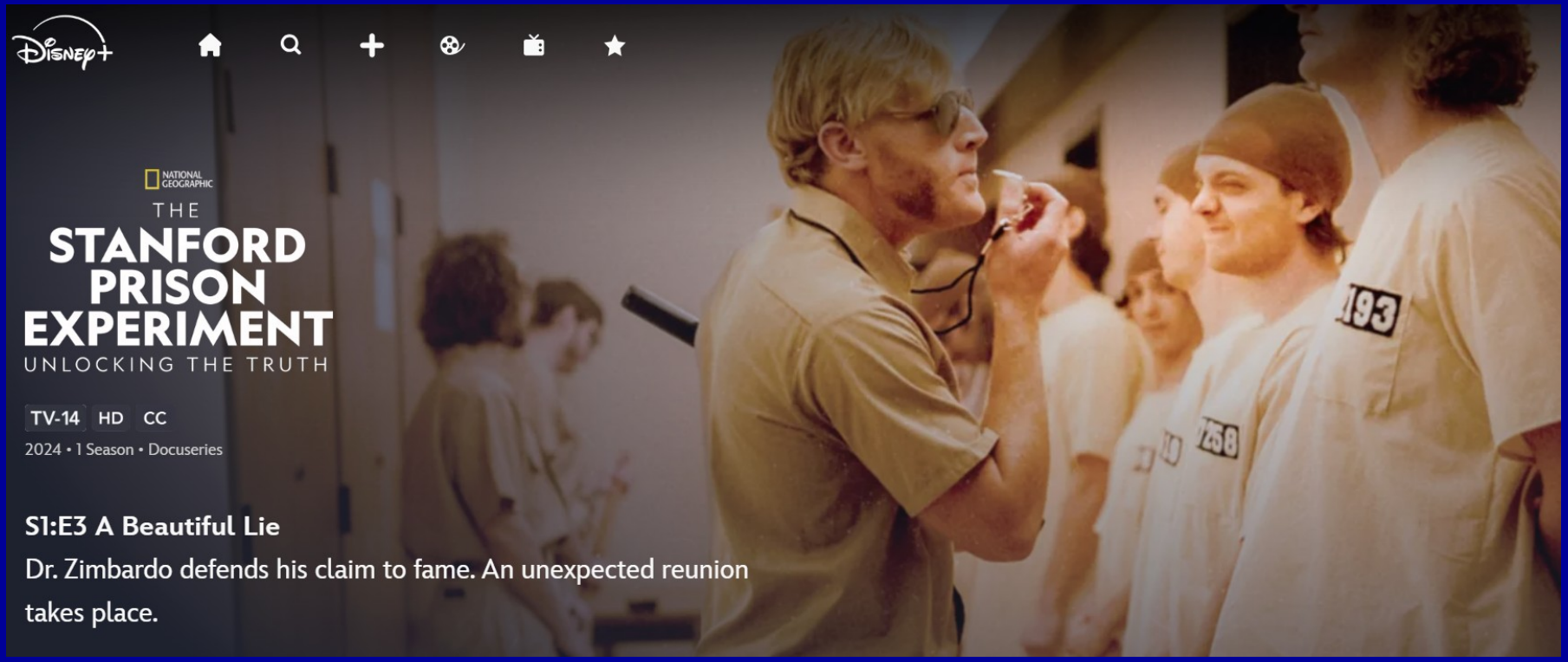
2) The structures of authority render us obedient

- In Milgram’s study, the institutionalized and legitimized authority of the prestigious scientist from Yale was difficult to overcome
- People often risk ridicule, ostracism, or punishment by challenging these structures of authority
- E.g., talk back to your teacher, police officer, boss, etc.
- Try this, and you will likely FEEL the discomfort of opposing these structures

3) Bureaucracies are highly effective structures of authority
   - Bureaucracy – a highly structured, hierarchical form of organization designed to manage large groups of people and tasks efficiently
   - Efficiency is typically achieved by breaking jobs into many small tasks
   - Therefore, no single individual is necessarily responsible and, thus, conformity is more likely

- There have been other studies that have looked at this question of conformity/obedience

- The Stanford prison experiment by Philip Zimbardo
  - Randomly assigned volunteers, who were college students, to be either guards or prisoners in a simulated prison environment
  - The study was cancelled after 6 days (it was supposed to last 2 weeks) because “guards” became abusive and “prisoners” became emotionally distressed
  - “The Stanford Prison Experiment: Unlocking the Truth” on Disney+



What happened reveals how the structures of authority within a given social context (e.g., a prison) can dramatically shape an individual's actions, and even sometimes override individual beliefs, values, and morals

- The Stanford prison experiment by Philip Zimbardo
  - Randomly assigned volunteers, who were college students, to be either guards or prisoners in a simulated prison environment
  - The study was cancelled after 6 days (it was supposed to last 2 weeks) because “guards” became abusive and “prisoners” became emotionally distressed
  - “The Stanford Prison Experiment: Unlocking the Truth” on Disney+
    - At the same time, the documentary questions the entire foundation upon which the study was based
- We’ll come back to the concept of conformity in our next topic on deviance and

When we think of conformity and obedience, we often think of them in negative terms, or things we want to

However, it’s important to recognize that conformity and obedience aren’t inherently negative; in fact, they are essential components for maintaining a well-functioning and cohesive society

"We are half-ruined by conformity, but we should be wholly ruined without it”

Charles Dudley Warner

NONCONFORMITY

The fastest way to get your ass replaced around here.

fakeposters.com